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Rusko, Rauno Tapio; Hietanen, Suvi Lenita; Kohtakangas, Krista Leena; Järvi, Taina

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## **Roles of career anchors and path dependency in the entrepreneurial process: case Finland**

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**Rauno Rusko\***

Faculty of Social Sciences,  
University of Lapland,  
P.O.B. 122, FI96101 Rovaniemi, Finland  
Email: rauno.rusko@ulapland.fi  
\*Corresponding author

**Lenita Hietanen**

Faculty of Education,  
University of Lapland,  
P.O.B. 122, FI96101 Rovaniemi, Finland  
Email: lenita.hietanen@ulapland.fi

**Krista Kohtakangas**

Faculty of Social Sciences,  
University of Lapland,  
P.O.B. 122, FI96101 Rovaniemi, Finland  
Email: krista.kohtakangas@ulapland.fi

**Taina Järvi**

Lapland Vocational College,  
Porokatu 35, FI 96400 Rovaniemi, Finland  
Email: taina.jarvi@lao.fi

**Abstract:** Studies of entrepreneurship education emphasise the impact of this educational process in career and entrepreneurship development. This study focuses in particular on the impact of the decision to start entrepreneurship education at the university level. Traditionally, career anchors are associated with relatively stable career development, but through an analysis of 59 life stories, this research observed that career anchors are more flexible. This study revealed four main types of previous life paths among the students beginning the entrepreneurship studies program (ESP) in Northern Finland, including their transitions between latent nascent entrepreneurship and actual entrepreneurship and between different career anchors. Entrepreneurship experiences do not always mean continuum in an entrepreneurship career.

**Keywords:** career anchors; entrepreneurial process; competencies; path dependency.

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**Biographical notes:** Rauno Rusko is a Lecturer of Management in the University of Lapland. He is specialised in, e.g., industrial organisation and cooperation emphasising the branches of tourism, forest industry, education and ICT. His works have been published in the *Forest Policy and Economics*, the *International Journal of Business Environment*, the *International Journal of Tourism Research*, *European Management Journal*, *Industrial Marketing Management*, *International Journal of Technoentrepreneurship*, *Technology Analysis & Strategic Management* and *International Journal of Innovation in the Digital Economy (IJIDE)* and others.

Lenita Hietanen is a University Lecturer in Music Education in the Faculty of Education at the University of Lapland in Finland. She has been The Chair of the Scientific Association for Entrepreneurship Education in Finland since 2016. Her main research interests are teaching and learning in general, curricula, entrepreneurship education, blended learning, and music education. She has acted as a reviewer in international peer-reviewed academic journals and focused her publications on entrepreneurship education, music education, and blended learning as examples. In addition, she has participated in several projects, and developed models about facilitating both entrepreneurship education and music education.

Krista Kohtakangas is a PhD candidate at the University of Lapland, Faculty of Social Sciences, majoring in administrative science, especially in leadership psychology. Her research interests are leadership psychology, entrepreneurship, and self-compassion.

Taina Järvi is a teacher in entrepreneurship education and business for adults at Lapland Vocational College. Her research interests are entrepreneur education and teaching and learning especially at vocational education. Her works have been published in the *Journal of Small Business and Enterprise Development*, and *Journal of Vocational Education and Training*.

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## 1 Introduction

A great deal of entrepreneurship education research focuses on entrepreneurship studies and competencies in higher education (Kuratko, 2005; Rae, 2010). One key question is whether the career of an entrepreneur is born or made (Looi and Khoo-Lattimore, 2015). Among other topics, the impact of entrepreneurship studies has been examined to some extent (Vanevenhoven and Liguori, 2013). Zhang et al. (2014) reported that among university students in China, prior entrepreneurial exposure seemed to hinder entrepreneurial intentions, but entrepreneurship education seemed to have a significantly positive impact on entrepreneurial intentions. However, in one Portuguese university context, Farhangmehr et al. (2016) noted that entrepreneurship education improves the knowledge base about entrepreneurship but does not motivate university students to

become entrepreneurs. At one Finnish university of applied sciences, students having an entrepreneurial family background, especially when the mother was an entrepreneur, had a positive impact on entrepreneurial intentions (Joensuu-Salo et al., 2015). Recognising these mixed findings, environmental and pedagogical learning solutions seem to have a great impact on the effectiveness of entrepreneurship education, as measured by the number of start-ups launched (Walter and Block, 2016). In addition, Dana (2001) pointed out that entrepreneurship training programs should be relevant to the host environment and not simply copied from one particular example context to other places indiscriminately. Based on their findings, Blenker et al. (2012) also emphasise that entrepreneurship education should take into account differences in contexts, cultures, and circumstances. In terms of outcome measurement, after a systemic review of 159 published articles from 2004 to 2016 that were focused on entrepreneurial outcomes, Nabi et al. (2017) reported that research considering the impacts of entrepreneurship education mainly focused on short-term and subjective outcomes instead of on the pedagogies in entrepreneurship education programs (see also Jones and Iredale, 2014).

It is evident that people pursuing entrepreneurship will have to alter their careers to be more self-directed in the labour market (Meijers et al., 2013), which requires more understanding of how to evaluate, plan, review, promote, and enact a shift to entrepreneurial career forming (Gold and Fraser, 2002; Arthur, 1994). In addition, some research examines career anchors (e.g., Schein, 1974) and entrepreneurial competencies (e.g., Mitchelmore and Rowley, 2010; Onstenk, 2003); both career anchors and competencies are generally regarded as stable (Schein, 1974). Despite the rich research carried out in these fields, a smaller amount of research focuses on the moment when students in an ESP start to think about becoming self-employed (Brixy et al., 2012; Delmar and Davidsson, 2000; Grilo and Irigoyen, 2006). In the current investigation, employees or full-time non-business students that have decided to begin study in the ESP in Northern Finland are defined as latent nascent entrepreneurs because of their obvious interest in entrepreneurship (see Brixy et al., 2012). In lessons implemented mostly online and in the evening, students were encouraged to use and share their previous knowledge and competencies in entrepreneurship, and to some extent, to manage their studies autonomously (Hietanen, 2015). Overall, guiding goals, instead of teacher-led studying, enabled more student-centred learning (Robinson et al., 2016). According to Meijers et al. (2013), to encourage students to become more self-directed in their careers in general, it is advisable to allow students to make their own choices about what they want to learn and then to ask them to articulate why they want to learn those things (see also Grilo and Irigoyen, 2006; Grilo and Thurik, 2005). Nonetheless, despite e-learning possibilities and encouragement of students toward autonomous and peer learning, some guidance organised by the lecturer is needed (see Asarta and Schmidt, 2017). The ESP examined in this study is open to the general university student body, which creates significant diversity among the students and their backgrounds (Hietanen, 2015). By considering students' life paths previous to entering the ESP, it is easier for lecturers to target their guidance. In addition, in an effort to find more effective ways to facilitate and accelerate students in ESP towards actual entrepreneurship and to avoid drop-outs from the program, educators must recognise how to provide sufficient support at the right times, especially when the individual is transforming from nascent to actual entrepreneurship (see Brixy et al., 2012). By considering previous parts of students'

entrepreneurial careers, previous connections with and experience in entrepreneurship can be utilised as a resource on their entrepreneurial path; such consideration is not necessarily provided in all educational contexts (see Blenker et al., 2008).

The purpose of this research is to discover the most effective ways to either facilitate diverse students' entrepreneurial processes from latent nascent entrepreneurship (Brixy et al., 2012; Jackson, 2010) to actual entrepreneurship or to strengthen their actual entrepreneurship (Grilo and Irigoyen, 2006; Grilo and Thurik, 2005) during the ESP (25 credit points, approximately one year). Students' previous entrepreneurial processes are examined by exploring students' life stories and competency insights in order to recognise their career aspirations, career anchors, and path dependency as related to entrepreneurship study. As the outcome of the present study, students' experiences in their previous lives, learning situations, and workplaces are noted and utilised to direct them toward nascent entrepreneurship or to strengthen their actual entrepreneurship.

This research uses and analyses material from 59 adult entrepreneurship student essays, collected at the beginning of the study program. The following issues are considered: What kinds of career anchors and movements across those career anchors exist among this group at various stages of the entrepreneurial process as well as between entrepreneurship and non-entrepreneurship, and what is the relationship between these entrepreneurship students and both existing and needed competencies when considering entry into actual entrepreneurship? First, this paper presents a brief discussion of the stages of the entrepreneurial process. Second, it defines competency, both in general and particularly as related to career anchors and path dependency. Finally, the paper presents analysis of the data and results, as well as implications for future research and practice in the entrepreneurial learning process.

## **2 Competencies, career anchors, and path dependency related to the entrepreneurial process**

### *2.1 Stages of the entrepreneurial process*

Most often, becoming an entrepreneur is a long process. The very early phases have not been examined in depth, although the very first actions towards self-employment are definitely remarkable. Some scholars differentiate only between latent and actual entrepreneurship (Grilo and Irigoyen, 2006; Grilo and Thurik, 2005), whereas some others differentiate, for example, nascent entrepreneurs and nascent intrapreneurs from business owners (Delmar and Davidsson, 2000). In the current paper, the definition of Brixy et al. (2012) is used regarding the early stages of the entrepreneurial process. They define a *latent nascent entrepreneur* as a person who is in a very early phase of the entrepreneurial process and starts to think about becoming self-employed. On the other hand, a *nascent entrepreneur* is a person who has taken some action to create a new business and expects to own or share ownership of the firm (Brixy et al., 2012). Finally, Brixy et al. (2012) define an existing entrepreneur as a *young entrepreneur*. In the case of the current study, some students were entrepreneurs with longer careers, which led the authors to prefer terminology of Grilo and Thurik (2005) and Grilo and Irigoyen (2006) of *actual entrepreneurship* to refer to an existing entrepreneur.

## 2.2 Competencies

The objective of an ESP is to increase entrepreneurial knowledge, skills, and competencies among students who may want to own and/or manage a business. Developing entrepreneurial understanding can be considered as learning *for* entrepreneurship, *about* entrepreneurship, or *to understand* entrepreneurship (e.g. Co and Mitchell, 2006; Hytti and O’Gorman, 2004; Kirby, 2004). In addition, Gibb (1990, 1993) states that it is important to understand the way in which entrepreneurs live, i.e. to understand entrepreneurship for working life or to become more entrepreneurial in existing working environments (Hytti and O’Gorman, 2004). Learning about entrepreneurship can be seen as a process, including activities that entrepreneurs really do (learning through entrepreneurship); the characteristics of a person that result in successful job performance; and how he/she acts in terms of practical application (learning for entrepreneurship) (cf. Gibb Dyer, 1994).

Mitchelmore and Rowley (2010) identify business and management, human relations, conceptual, and relationship competencies as key for entrepreneurship. Further, competencies include the capability to scan one’s environment, choose potential opportunities, and take advantage of those opportunities by formulating necessary strategies (Chandler and Jansen, 1992). In Gibb’s (1993) perspective, the competencies of an entrepreneur/entrepreneurial actions are examined as entrepreneurial skills, behaviours, and attitudes. These aspects are common to both working life and entrepreneurship education, since they can be learned at work or understood via entrepreneurial pursuits. Employees must have ‘an ability to perform certain tasks for which knowledge, skills, attitudes, and motivations are necessary’ [Gibb, (1990), p.21], thus enabling them to manage knowledge, see opportunities, and achieve better results. Boyatzis (1982) defines job competency as an underlying personal characteristic: either a motive, trait, or skills aspect of one’s self image or social role, or a body of knowledge that one uses. Employers can add value by organising resources and opportunities. Entrepreneurial skills, behaviours, and attitudes help to manage existing work better or perhaps to see opportunities to start a new business venture of one’s own.

## 2.3 Competencies and career anchors

In his study of 44 graduates of the Sloan School of Management, Schein (1974) identifies five general career anchors:

- 1 managerial competency
- 2 technical/functional competency
- 3 organisational security
- 4 creativity
- 5 autonomy.

He associates entrepreneurship with the creativity anchor and – in the case of entrepreneurs focused on consultancy – with autonomy, technical/functional competency, and management competency. In the creativity career anchor, individuals express a strong need to create something of their own. According to Schein (1974, p.10) in the creativity anchor there is a ‘fundamental need operating in the entrepreneur and it

expresses itself in the desire to invent a new business vehicle, find a new product, develop a new service, or in some other way create something new which can be clearly identified with the individual'. In entrepreneurs, Schein (1974) finds a desire to be on their own and free of organisational constraints. However, they have not left 'the world of business' to achieve their autonomy, but rather they try to express their business and managerial skills through building their own enterprises. According to Schein (1996), there has always been a small group who define their careers in terms of overcoming impossible odds, solving the unsolved problems, and winning out over one's competitors.

Gibb Dyer (1994) does not express a career anchor perspective, but develops a typology about the comprehensive theory of entrepreneurial careers:

- 1 a theory of career choice
- 2 a theory of career socialisation
- 3 a theory of career orientation
- 4 a theory of career progression from entry to exit.

He has also studied entrepreneurship as a career, while his interpretation emphasises the importance of underlying competencies in the context of entrepreneurial career development. According to Gibb Dyer (1994, p.11), "those who engage in entrepreneurial activity often do not define themselves as entrepreneurs... They see themselves as real estate developers, retailers, engineers, and so forth, who just happened to start a business".

#### *2.4 Changeable strategies: path dependency perspective on competencies and career anchors*

The career anchors theory assumes that individuals are following the careers they have started and with which they have become familiar. That is, their professional strategy or vision is deliberative and stable; under this theory, intentional strategies are also their actual realised strategies. Movement across different types of career anchors is insignificant; for example, the importance of change events in career development is not taken into account (Rice, 2013). Figure 1 depicts example career paths following the assumptions of the career anchors perspective, according to which at some age an individual decides upon or drifts toward a career anchor, such as:

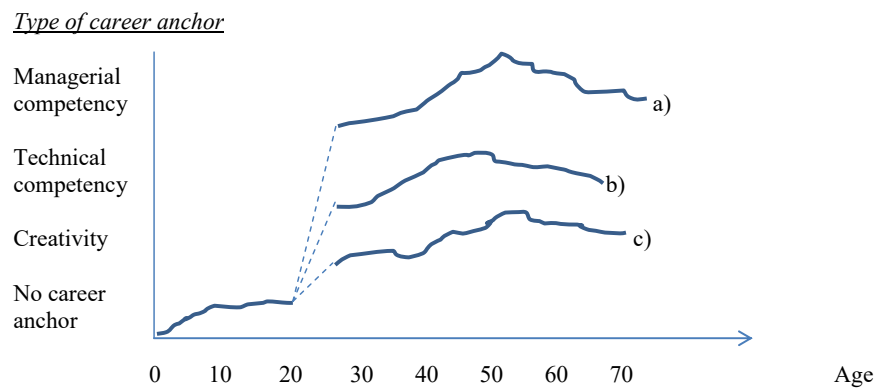
- a managerial competency
- b technical competency
- c creativity.

After this decision or drift, the individual follows this career anchor for the rest of his/her work career.

However, this assumption of the personal strategy remaining within a constant career anchor does not align with the basic themes of strategy research in business and organisations: most company or organisational strategies change (Mintzberg et al., 2005). Furthermore, only some intentional strategies become realised strategies; most strategies are actually emergent strategies, which allow several remarkable changes during periods of transformation (Mintzberg et al., 2005). Although the career anchors perspective

allows for some fluctuations in a person's career development, once initiated, the main category of career anchor, such as creativity, technical competency, or managerial competency, remains the same.

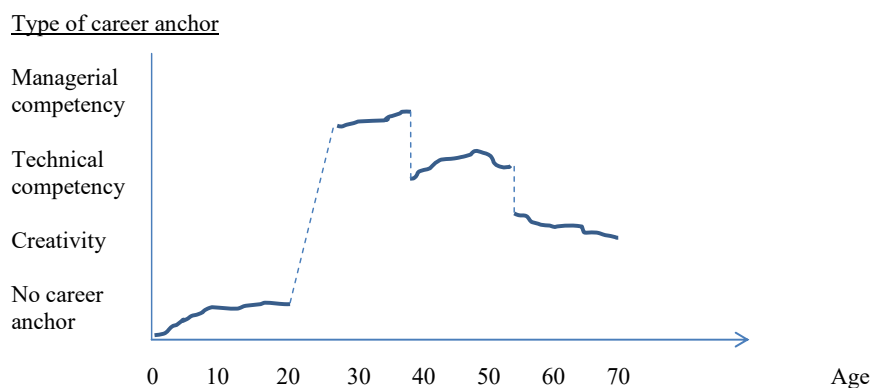
**Figure 1** The basic career anchor perspective (see online version for colours)



The career anchors theorem resembles the path dependency perspective, which is a typical way of considering the long-term development of firms or industries (Vanacker et al., 2014). Koch (2008, p.52) states that path dependency 'can be understood as a conceptual framework that explains emerging phenomena in a processual perspective. It does so by focusing on self-reinforcing mechanisms and shaping specific strategic practices (routines and resources) that finally lead to a strategic lock-in situation and thus to a lack of strategic responsiveness'.

However, Sylvander et al. (2004) suggest that this 'lack of strategic responsiveness' can change during strategic turning points. Such a perspective is parallel with Mintzberg et al.'s (2005) concepts of emergent strategy (learning school) and transformation phases (configuration school), and also with Rusko's (2014) popular strategy-as-practice perspective.

**Figure 2** Example of 'strategic turning points' applied to the career anchor perspective (see online version for colours)





An interesting question is whether these ‘strategic turning points’ are also relevant in a micro-level context, e.g. in the context of career anchors. Generally, the career anchors perspective resembles the path dependency perspective, with constant, long-term, personal ‘strategies’ or anchors. Figure 2 depicts strategic turning points in the life of an individual during his/her career development; it assumes that a career anchor may change because of personal or external reasons.

### **3 Research strategy**

#### *3.1 Methodological solutions*

The ESP in question lasts one to two years, depending on whether the student participates in subject-related studies (35 credit points) in addition to the basic studies of entrepreneurship (25 credit points). However, even during this short period, student attitudes toward entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial action will undergo changes. The program includes distance teaching in the evenings, which allows students to participate regardless of their geographical location and after the other daily duties. Therefore, the students represent a wide variety of backgrounds, experiences, ages, and life situations, which lead to different motives for studying entrepreneurship (see Hietanen, 2015). These varying motives offer grounds for examining different career plans and developmental needs related to entrepreneurship. This study’s conception is that the students represent at least latent nascent entrepreneurs, because of their already expressed interest in participating in the ESP (Brixy et al., 2012; Hietanen, 2015). The study investigates each person’s motives and compares various life cycle paths with one another. These comparisons depict the spectrum of different forms of entrepreneurship and how entrepreneurship is linked with individual career development. Politis (2005) suggests that entrepreneurs’ career experience is an integral element in the process of entrepreneurial learning, in addition to the transformation process and entrepreneurial knowledge. The learning environment, including pedagogical solutions and especially their relevance given the surrounding environment’s needs and culture, needs to be carefully designed to enable remarkable outcomes (Blenker et al., 2012; Dana, 2001; Dana and Dana, 2005; Jones and Iredale, 2014). In addition, Blenker et al. (2008) and Fayolle (2013) suggest that when discussing the implementation of entrepreneurship education, educators should specify what is actually done and how. Based on this background, this study’s research questions have been formulated as follows:

- RQ1 What kinds of career anchors and movements across career anchors exist within this group?
- RQ2 What is the relationship between these entrepreneurship students and both existing and needed competencies when considering entry into actual entrepreneurship?

Referring to Dana and Dumez (2015) and using both inductive and, to some extent, deductive approaches, this study’s research strategy followed the logic of content analysis, i.e. transitioning the data from inductive category development toward a more deductive approach (Mayring, 2000), while processing qualitative textual data into

clusters of similar entities or conceptual categories (Julien, 2008) and discussing the findings in comparison with previous research.

Thus the analysis is completed as theory-guided content analysis (Krippendorff, 2004). The goal is to identify consistent patterns and relationships between variables or themes. According to Julien (2008), the researcher spends time revisiting categories identified previously and combines or divides them, resolving contradictions, as the text is analysed over and over. To avoid a possible equifinality (Dana and Dumez, 2015), the methodological approach is constructive, which allows for an open-minded view of the data and space for even unexpected results (Kasanen et al., 1993).

### *3.2 The participants, data, and data collection*

The research data in this study consists of 59 written essays by students that participated in the ESP. The essays are from two different student groups: 28 stories from the 2012 group and 32 stories from the 2013 group. As Dana and Dumez (2015) remind us, the actors and their activities should be carefully noticed. The students in question have huge variability in their backgrounds; for example, among them there were leaders, sales keepers, full-time non-business students, and entrepreneurs. The students were guided to reflect on their experiences, beliefs, and competencies/knowledge about entrepreneurship as an orientation towards the studies in the ESP. Two articles were used as background material: a short column by the Director General of the State Treasury, Timo Laitinen, and a book chapter from the Entrepreneurship Education series (Kyrö et al., 2007). The exercise instructions were as follows: 'Write a 2-4 page text in which you reflect on entrepreneurship through two articles. You can choose the form and style of the text to be an essay, story, poem, etc. In the text you should describe your own thoughts about entrepreneurship. How is entrepreneurship present in your life at the moment? What do you think constitutes entrepreneurship? How is it created? What are your goals for these studies? What do you expect from yourself and other students? What will you bring to the group? What are your challenges and strengths in these studies?'

The decision to collect data at the early stage of the study program is in line with Tian et al. (2014), who showed that greater speed in making the final decision about career in the career process is one of the most significant predictors of positive career-related outcomes.

### *3.3 Analysis*

Analysis began with two researchers reading the 59 essays once, after which they constructed a general view of the data. Proceeding inductively and data-sensitively, it seemed salient to approach the data by focusing on differences in the individuals' backgrounds and on different issues that were emphasised in their conceptions of entrepreneurship. This approach focused on the experiences the individuals were reflecting on when perceiving entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial actions. Analysis of these perceptions revealed four different kinds of life story or career path groups: 'novices' (13 of 59), 'workers' (22 of 59), 'entrepreneurs' (12 of 59), and 'bystanders' (12 of 59). This distribution is an interpreted categorisation of the research population, rather than being based on statistical information about the individuals' backgrounds; in this way, the categorisation remained loyal to the data and to the immediate conceptions found in the data. To be precise, 'novices' may have work experience, but other non-

work aspects of their lives were emphasised in their essays; similarly, 'workers' may have enterprising experiences, but their essays emphasised non-entrepreneurial employment experience; these experiences were simply not emphasised. Moreover, individuals may have similar career goals regardless of their group. The results section of this paper discusses the groups in more detail.

After establishing this division of groups, the two researchers scanned the text again and confirmed placement of the author of the life story into one of the four groups, depending on the emphasis of their perspective. The essays were examined thoroughly by seeking which aspects of entrepreneurship were disclosed, in which tone these aspects were presented, and what information was provided from the persons' perspective (e.g. family enterprise or work experience). The data was then coded basing on the main content of each essay and categorised using the Mindjet™ MindManager mapping tool.

The coding process led to the emergence of six clusters:

- a existing competencies
- b needs for development
- c consideration
- d dimensions of entrepreneurship
- e entrepreneurial intention
- f former experiences.

These clusters or categories were kept as open as possible. For example, cluster (A), existing competencies, was open to any description of skills, attitudes, and behaviour that was present in the essays when the individuals wrote about themselves. Following the same logic, cluster (B), needs for development, included any mention of missing skills, attitudes, or behaviour considered, while cluster (D), dimensions of entrepreneurship, was open to any perceived characteristics, opinions, and requirements of entrepreneurship and the entrepreneur. Clusters (F), former experiences, and (E), entrepreneurial intention, later referred to as consideration of entrepreneurial entry, were coded according to what the person cited as having experienced in the past and whether he/she had stated an intention of starting up a business alongside their entrepreneurship studies. Finally, cluster (C), consideration, included more common descriptions and 'reporting' of entrepreneurship, education, upbringing, and society.

Clustering was one step to reduce the data and to enable comparison between individuals based on their perspectives. It became evident that entrepreneurial competencies could be found in several clusters and not just in cluster (A), existing competencies. This may have been due to a lack of reflective practice, i.e. that students were not used to evaluating their knowledge and skills, or it may be that the assignment was not explicit about considering one's competencies when it came to perceptions of entrepreneurship.

Further analysis considered which competencies each of the four career path groups elicited. Moreover, the rich data enabled investigation of what competencies these four groups expressed as developmental needs when considering careers as entrepreneurs or other entrepreneurial actions. These research perspectives could shed light on how (work) experiences and the self-reflected need for competencies explain entrepreneurial entry and possible 'strategic turning points' in career anchors.

## 4 Results

The four groups (novices, workers, entrepreneurs, and bystanders), their competencies, and their competency needs are examined below through a three-step analysis. First, the groups are introduced. Second, group attributes are considered in terms of existing competencies and the expressed need for competencies. Third, these attributes are discussed in terms of how they reflect on career anchors and movements across career anchors, e.g. entrepreneurial entry.

### 4.1 Career path groups

The ‘novices’ group is comprised of individuals who identified themselves as inexperienced in the field of entrepreneurship. At the same time, many of them were completing a university degree. This group perceived entrepreneurship as a possible career choice, either connecting it to their major subject or considering it as a new venture after some work experience. The attitude of this group was cautiously enthusiastic, open-minded, and enchanted by the possibilities related to entrepreneurship. According to Brixy et al. (2012), they could be defined at least as *latent nascent entrepreneurs*.

The largest group, ‘workers’, refers to individuals who had work experience or other significant life experience that they used as a framework for perceiving entrepreneurship. Their experience varied across public sector, private sector, and entrepreneurial work experience. The attitude of this group was often ‘challenging the state of things’, based on changes they had observed or desired in their working life. Entrepreneurship was one career possibility among others, perhaps a new one; the entrepreneurship studies were a change to develop entrepreneurial competencies in their profession. Using Brixy et al.’s (2012) definition, this group represents mostly *nascent entrepreneurs*, in that they may plan to start a business.

The ‘entrepreneurs’ group expressed having ‘lived’ an entrepreneurial experience, whether presently running their own business or having done so at some point in their career. This group was motivated either to develop their business skills through entrepreneurial action or to update their entrepreneurial skills that had originated from their current or former experience. Their attitudes could be described as analytical, since they reflected on their own entrepreneurial characteristics as a tool for working life. The ‘entrepreneurs’ group falls closer to Brixy et al.’s (2012) definition of *nascent entrepreneurs* than *young entrepreneurs* or *actual entrepreneurs* (Grilo and Thurik, 2005; Grilo and Irigoyen, 2006), because this study’s ‘entrepreneurs’ largely still work as employees.

The ‘bystanders’ group was formed after the foundation of the three former groups, because the members had a different tone from any other group. Their originality derives from witnessing entrepreneurship and enterprising relatively closely, so that their perceptions are largely based on ‘secondary experiences’, for better or for worse. Nevertheless, the attitude of this group can be defined as determination to find out for themselves the truth about entrepreneurship as a career.

#### *4.2 Reflections on competencies and competency needs*

All four groups – novices, workers, entrepreneurs, and bystanders – brought up several competencies and competency needs related to their motives for studying entrepreneurship. As noted earlier, this study widened identification of expressed competencies to draw from other clusters besides cluster (A), existing competencies. Cluster (F), former experiences, were chosen to support the competency perspective; for seeking competency needs, both clusters (B), needs for development, and (D), dimensions of entrepreneurship, were used (see Table 1).

The competency expressions of the ‘novices’ group included straightforward, often brief, descriptions of the student’s attitude, skills, and readiness for studying entrepreneurship. Attitudinal competencies demonstrated open-mindedness, curiosity, and motivation to learn and apply knowledge to students’ major subjects and to consider entrepreneurship as a possible future career. Skills mentioned included interpersonal skills, innovation, creativity (art students), and subject matter knowledge. For this group, learning itself was not a problem, since the majority of them were completing other studies concurrently.

The competencies expressed by the ‘workers’ group could be divided into skills, experience, and attitudes. Skills included descriptions of social skills and occupational knowledge. Experience stems from work reality; group members have worked in different organisations and enterprises and have witnessed leadership, resource competition, and work-related responsibilities. Attitudes comprised personality-related factors, such as open-mindedness, reflective abilities, high motivation for learning and self-development, and diligence. Overall, the ‘workers’ group reflected on their work or other significant experiences. To some extent, they seemed to have a stirring of empowerment in their reflections. Their idea of an entrepreneur is someone who is intrinsically determined to develop themselves and the business. Enterprising includes substantial work that is creative and requires passion. Interestingly, ‘workers’ also tended to consider the complementary aspects of being alone versus together in entrepreneurship, recognising not only the individual responsibilities in enterprising but also the reality of being dependent on networks, customers, and other supportive people close to the entrepreneur.

The third group, ‘entrepreneurs’, consisted of individuals having entrepreneurial experience. Their listed competencies included experience and skills as well as attitude factors. Experience and skills were combined because it was difficult to differentiate between the skills they learned during their entrepreneurial experiences and their general skills. In terms of experience and skill competencies, they naturally presented concrete experience competencies of how to start a business, see opportunities, solve problems, handle practical issues, manage a dual career, and end a business. In addition, they may have studied entrepreneurship or other subjects and had experience from other employment as well. In their attitude competencies, they manifested determination, creativity, the will to serve and work hard, and motivation to develop and challenge themselves.

The ‘bystanders’ group included individuals with a variety of backgrounds and experiences, but they were separated from other groups as they had ‘a witnessed experience’ of entrepreneurship, which affected their reflections. Their competencies

consisted of attitude and experience factors. As attitudinal competencies they presented positivity, curiosity, interest, flexibility, and the will to work in accordance with one's values. As experience they expressed occupational perspectives, knowing the reality of enterprising, and being 'naturally' connected to enterprising and entrepreneurial thinking by witnessing them first-hand. A summary of these group classifications is presented in Table 1.

**Table 1** Summary of group classifications

		<i>Competencies</i>		<i>Competency needs</i>
Novices	<i>Attitude</i>	motivation, curiosity	<i>Concrete knowledge</i>	entrepreneurship know-how, anticipation of risks and pitfalls
	<i>Skills</i>	interpersonal skills, subject knowledge, learning skills, creativity, and innovation	<i>Self-knowledge</i>	strengths, weaknesses, work processes
			<i>Releasing potential</i>	courage, attitudinal changes, opportunity recognition
			<i>Experimenting</i>	sharing and testing ideas
Workers	<i>Skills</i>	social skills, occupational knowledge	<i>Concrete knowledge</i>	entrepreneurship know-how, human resource thinking
	<i>Experience</i>	leadership, business practices, resource thinking, work responsibilities	<i>Preparing for change</i>	career paths, time to think
	<i>Attitude</i>	open-mindedness, reflection, high motivation for learning and self-development, diligence	<i>Supporting existing profession</i>	developing potential, tools, and understanding
			<i>Self-development needs</i>	idea development, implementation, courage
Entrepreneurs	<i>Experience and skills</i>	entrepreneurship know-how, opportunity identification, problem-solving, dual career with other employment	<i>Theoretical knowledge</i>	up-to-date, new perspectives, cross-scientific knowledge
	<i>Attitude</i>	determination, creativity, will to serve and work hard, motivation to develop and challenge oneself	<i>Self-development</i>	self-confidence, idea testing and development, support for enterprising activity

**Table 1** Summary of group classifications (continued)

		Competencies	Competency needs	
Bystanders	Attitude	positivity, curiosity and interest, flexibility, will to work in line with one's values	Concrete knowledge	entrepreneurship know-how, anticipation of risks and pitfalls
	Experience	occupational experience, realistic perspective, absorbed entrepreneurial acting models	Releasing potential	self-knowledge, awareness of abilities, reshaping mental models, new 'boost' for career planning
			Experimenting	idea testing and development, enhancing courage and creativity

### 4.3 Career anchors and consideration of entrepreneurial entry

The data analysis also clustered information around the intention of becoming an entrepreneur or of pursuing supplementary knowledge that would be applied in an individual's occupation. This section takes a closer look at research questions (1 and 2): What kinds of career anchors and movements across career anchors exist within this case study group, and how are they related to both existing and needed competencies when considering entry into entrepreneurship?

**Table 2** Summary of analysed entrepreneurial intention

Entrepreneurial intention									
Group	Yes	(%)	Possible	(%)	No/not mentioned	(%)	Other career	(%)	Total (%)
Novices 22%	3	(23)	4	(31)	4	(31)	2	(15)	13 100
Workers 37.3%	4	(18, 5)	8	(36)	6	(27)	4	(18, 5)	22 100
Entrepreneurs 20.3%	5	(42)	1	(8)	2	(17)	4	(33)	12 100
Bystanders 20.3%	2	(17)	5	(41, 5)	4	(33)	1	(8, 5)	12 100
TOTAL	14	24%	18	30.5%	16	27%	11	18.5%	59 100

From the career anchors perspective, it can be concluded that the intention to change one's personal career is relatively strong among the case study population, which consisted of entrepreneurship students during their early phases of education. In fact, one-third of the students with entrepreneurial experience, the 'entrepreneur' group, were considering possibilities to change their careers. Over half (54.5%) of the 'workers' and 58.5% of the 'bystanders' were considering entrepreneurship as their new career path.

Most of the students already had career experience, excluding the 'novices' group. Half of the students with career experience, 23 out of 46, were willing to change their careers.

'Novices' were those individuals who had not yet developed their personal careers. In other words, they had not identified their career anchors. However, workers, entrepreneurs and bystanders had career experience and were familiar with their personal career anchor. In spite of this, half of them were considering possibilities to change their careers toward or away from entrepreneurship, i.e. they were ready to change their career anchors.

The essays revealed that many of the students can be classified as in the some kind of transformation phase, where they are ready to change their career anchors. Some of them were also willing to follow and strengthen their current career anchor via entrepreneurship studies. Interpretations of the current career anchor and whether the student wanted to follow this career anchor or change it are based on the essays.

The following examples show the students' intended transformation from the novice career anchor to a career anchor of entrepreneurship:

Currently, entrepreneurship is part of my thoughts and dreams. I mean that my aims are directed to the situation in which I possibly would have my own enterprise. Now, however, I am working in order to achieve this aim and dream. These studies are associated with this goal and are part of the important process, which you have to, or it is good to, perform, when you are wondering about your own business idea. (Student 18/2012)

I'm waiting for a new approach to entrepreneurship via these studies... I will bring the attitude of a young novice to this group. (Student 1/2013)

Some students already had a professional career anchor, but they were willing to change it, for example from managerial to technical competency, as they transitioned from 'worker' to 'entrepreneur':

I'm a 26 year old student of social work and my studies are nearly complete... I'm graduating to an area of work, which has a flagrant lack of workers, but not so fascinating working conditions ... During my studies I have felt pressure to find alternatives to the municipality as an employer. One of [the alternatives] is entrepreneurship. (Student 19/2013)

The essays also contained several stories in which the career anchor had already changed and thus the students were not waiting on any transformation phase of their career anchors during their entrepreneurship studies.

I have entrepreneurs in my family, I have acted as an entrepreneur, and I have already studied some entrepreneurship. I utilize this subject matter ability in my teaching activities in several courses, which I teach and have taught in vocational schools and high schools. (Student 1/2012)

My own activities in working life have been in several ways entrepreneurial or even actual entrepreneurship, whether I wanted it or not. I've done my career in a research services firm, where I'm also an owning partner...If I can at least partly have my income as an entrepreneur following my own interests in the future, I would be happy with the situation. (Student 3/2013)

Currently my own entrepreneurship is mainly part-time because I'm a part-time educator in the branches of natural products (entrepreneurship) and services in adult education, just started these activities... but I see that of it all, this branch (entrepreneurship) is the one what I want to develop. (Student 14/2013)



Following the idea introduced in Figure 2, that transitions of individual careers between career anchors are possible, comes the notion of combined career anchors, depicted in Figure 3. Two categories – workers and bystanders – are combined because both groups' members already have their own careers, which are not closely related with entrepreneurship. These two groups contain working, management, and education experiences. From the career anchors perspective, the most important question is whether they continue to follow their careers outside of entrepreneurship or within entrepreneurship, which means a change in their career anchor category.

**Figure 3** Combined career anchors and their intended progression (see online version for colours)

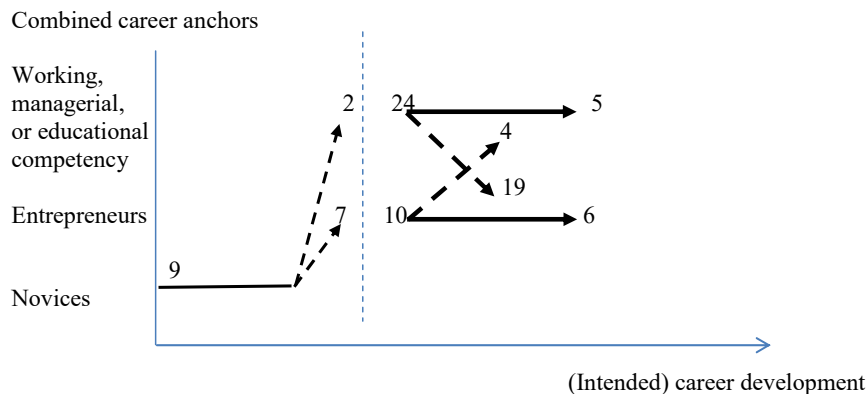


Figure 3 illustrates intended career development, which does not necessarily mean realised career development. Intended career development was recognised among 73% of all students. Career development outcomes are expected: the ESP is not an obligatory part of any main subject's program requirements. The students found their way into this entrepreneurship education program in order to develop their entrepreneurial skills and competencies (see Table 1). Competencies are the driving forces of career anchors (cf. Schein, 1974, 1996), and an individual's decision to pursue entrepreneurship education means the intention to develop competencies associated with entrepreneurship and perhaps the intention to establish an enterprise, at least in the long term. Excluding entrepreneurs, the establishment of enterprise would mean a drift in the person's career anchor.

Only one-fourth of ESP students are relatively sure in their consideration of entrepreneurship as their career, but over half of the students (54.5 %) see entrepreneurship as a possible career anchor in the future. Conversely, nearly half of the students (45.5%), before their first entrepreneurship lectures, are not aiming for an entrepreneurship career.

## 5 Discussion and conclusions

This research examined the written reflections of a group of entrepreneurship students, classified at least as latent nascent entrepreneurs, in terms of entrepreneurial competencies, needs and aspirations for competencies, and interpreted career anchors and

movements across career anchors between entrepreneurial and non-entrepreneurial career paths.

### *5.1 Competencies and four career path groups*

All four groups of students according to career path – novices, workers, entrepreneurs, and bystanders – interconnect to some extent in their competencies and competency needs, although their backgrounds are different. The linkage between career anchors and competencies is an obvious, but less studied, theme in the literature (Steele and Francis-Smythe, 2006). Within the groups, three common competency themes were repeated with different emphasis (see Table 1). Interestingly, the first competency that was brought up in every group was ‘attitude’. Indeed, attitude is remarkable when beginning to learn something new (e.g. Ames, 1992). Within this case study, attitude has to do with determination and motivation to develop oneself, curiosity toward a new field of knowledge and a possible career, engaging in learning, and investing time and effort in it. The second competency in support of the research question is ‘experience’. For workers, experience competencies arose from paid employment, during which they developed perceptions of leadership, managing one’s own work, resource thinking, and other business practices. For bystanders, experience competencies were similarly related to occupational perceptions, but also stemmed from absorbed entrepreneurial thrusts. The third competency among the groups was ‘skills’, which refers to the individuals as actors. In the case of the ‘entrepreneur’ group, skills and experience were combined. Reflections on the skills competency included perceived strengths in one’s action and work, such as social skills, learning skills, innovation and creativity, and professional skills, whether in one’s studied major or occupation. This categorisation of individuals into separate groups based on common career paths offers understanding about diverse expertise, attitudes, and motivations for attaining knowledge about entrepreneurship.

When considering the competency needs of these at least latent nascent entrepreneurs, a wider spectrum emerged than in the examination of existing competencies. A shared need of all groups was to acquire or deepen ‘knowledge of enterprising’ in practice, thus learning how to start a business and how to handle financial issues, marketing, networking, and human resources. Entrepreneurs wished for scientific and theoretical knowledge for updating and widening their perspectives on entrepreneurial activity. Novices and bystanders also found it important to consider the risks and pitfalls involved in enterprising. Overall, as expressed in the competency needs’ themes of ‘self-knowledge’, ‘experimenting’, and ‘releasing potential’, entrepreneurship studies programs seem to offer a place for experimenting and developing ideas, while projecting the perceived possibilities and requirements of entrepreneurship onto one’s current potential and needs for personal development. The ‘workers’ group in particular expressed the need for ‘preparation for change’ that demonstrates active consideration of career changes. Evidently, every group has aspirations for more courage and stronger self-confidence. This may be due to cultural characteristics and wider socio-political perspectives echoing from cluster (C), consideration, which included complaints about little appreciation of entrepreneurs and strict taxation implications for small enterprises.

In a more general way, this research data consists of life stories that are a suitable channel for interpreting long-term movements in the competencies and career development of individuals (Jackson, 2010; Lämsä and Hiillos, 2008). The life stories of, in this case, mostly middle-aged individuals, cover learned and adapted competencies as

well as earlier career and future expectations. Therefore, the case study material, though gathered at the beginning of the entrepreneurship education program, provides the possibility of studying career development and career anchors.

### *5.2 Intentions to change career paths and career anchor movement*

The content of students' life stories was unrestricted, which means the framework and emphasis of stories were not restricted to any existing perspectives, such as the classification of career anchors (Schein, 1974, 1996). Nevertheless, the case study material revealed individuals' intentions to change their careers or career anchors between non-entrepreneurship and entrepreneurship. Life stories revealed four main groups – novices, workers, entrepreneurs, and bystanders – which do not follow the traditional typology of Schein, yet have features of career anchors, such as long-term stability in the career. Many of the novices were deliberating between entrepreneurship and other careers, many workers and bystanders were thinking about entrepreneurship, and even entrepreneurs were considering possibilities as workers or other positions outside their enterprises, that is to say movement from entrepreneurship to non-entrepreneurship. According to the definition of Brixy et al. (2012), about one-fifth of this study's students were in the phase of latent nascent entrepreneur when starting the ESP. In addition, the group of entrepreneurs was shown to be primarily prospective entrepreneurs. Students' intentions regarding entrepreneurship studies would be interesting to research further, because in this early phase of study, their intentions to continue as entrepreneurs appeared very weak.

Stated competencies and competency needs reflect the career development aims of the students; for example, non-entrepreneurs lack entrepreneurial competencies but want to develop them. The challenging group for research is those students with entrepreneurship experiences, that is to say the 'entrepreneurs' group: they have entrepreneurial skills, and they want to update their entrepreneurship competencies and develop their self-confidence, not solely for the needs of their entrepreneurship career, but also to have the possibility of changing their career path from entrepreneurship to non-entrepreneurship. This complexity demonstrates the flexibility of both entrepreneurship studies and career development: entrepreneurial studies do not necessarily explain career movement, and career movement does not necessarily explain why a student may choose to study entrepreneurship. An entrepreneurship studies student may be planning a career that is not in entrepreneurship; similarly, an otherwise 'traditional' career path may involve entrepreneurship-oriented tasks and thus require entrepreneurial skills. This movement might partly explain the findings of Farhangmehr et al. (2016): some students of entrepreneurship are not planning to become entrepreneurs, when they are starting entrepreneurship education, which looks like afterwards as if the education do not motivate to be entrepreneurs.

These results show that long-term career anchors are not necessarily life-long: individuals have intentions to change their career development via education and learned competencies, even in middle age. These movements reflect some kind of goal instability and/or development. According to Bertoch et al. (2013) the degree of goal instability is directly related to negative career thoughts, dissatisfaction with career choice, and career tension. However, practical education, such as entrepreneurship education, provides a stable phase in the lives of these potential career changers. During these studies, they believe that they have sufficient time to decide on their future career paths. Deciding

one's professional career is a strategic decision, which might be based on a series of changes and developments in a person's life and environment. Thus, individual career strategy has the features of emergent strategy, which contains several transformation phases (cf. Mintzberg et al., 2005) and even strategic turning points (cf. Sylvander et al., 2004; Vanacker et al., 2014), which actually make it possible to change the prevailing long-term career anchor.

Entrepreneurship students appear to have needs for self-development in order to engage the possibility of changing the direction of their personal career (cf. Viršulienė, 2014). This study's analysis suggests that practical education, such as entrepreneurship education, enhances the potential for an *intentional* strategic turning point in the student's career. Furthermore, this study suggests that the career anchors perspective should take into greater account movements across career anchors in the middle or even latter parts of an individual's life cycle.

### 5.3 Research restrictions and themes for further study

Restrictions of this research include the emphasis on interpreting students' writings. Although the theoretical work was separate from the analysis, the discussions and the research process are interconnected, which may lead to biased interpretation of the data and, in this case, of the competencies and career anchors. While artificial classification was avoided, it was sometimes challenging to separate competencies in order to keep the amount of categories reasonable. In addition, the qualitative nature of the data may lead to slight inaccuracies in the statistics on entrepreneurial intention (Table 2 and Figure 3), which were not always clearly stated but were tracked as closely as possible.

This analysis was based on students' life stories, which describe, among other things, career anchors established before their entrepreneurship studies and intended career changes during and because of new entrepreneurship studies. Thus actual realised effects of the entrepreneurship studies program have not been evaluated here. A new and interesting theme for further study would be any differences between student intentions to change their career anchors and realised changes in their career anchors during and after their entrepreneurship studies.

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